



STRATEGIC PLANNING DOCUMENT

Adopted by the Alliance of Rouge Communities on 3/28/13

ORGANIZATION COMMITTEE

Co-Chairs:

Kelly Cave, Wayne County
Joan Seymour, Councilwoman, City of Southfield

Members:

Kathryn Hagaman, Bingham Farms
Tim Faas, Canton Township
James Murray, City of Dearborn
Tom Wilson, City of Romulus
Joe Colaianne, Oakland County

Participating ARC members:

Gary Mekjian, City of Farmington Hills (ARC Past Chair)
Karen Mondora, City of Farmington Hills
Brandy Siedlaczek, City of Southfield
Kevin Buford, Westland (ARC Chair)

Staff:

James Ridgway, ARC Executive Director
Zachare Ball, ARC Staff

INTRODUCTION

The Rouge River Watershed, located in Southeast Michigan, runs through the most densely populated and urbanized land area in the state. The watershed is approximately 438 square miles in size and includes all or part of 48 municipalities in three counties, with a population of over 1.4 million people.

The Alliance of Rouge Communities (hereinafter the ARC), a 501(c)(3) organization, was formed under the provisions of Part 312 Watershed Alliances, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act as amended by Public Act 517, 2004. Local public agencies and communities within the Rouge River Watershed believe there are substantial benefits that can be derived under this Watershed Alliance through cooperative management of the Rouge River and in providing mutual assistance in meeting state water discharge permit requirements. The purpose of the ARC is to provide an institutional mechanism to encourage watershed-wide cooperation and mutual support to meet water quality permit requirements and to restore beneficial uses of the Rouge River to the area residents.

The ARC is currently comprised of 35 municipal governments (i.e. cities, townships and villages), three counties (i.e., Wayne, Oakland and Washtenaw), Henry Ford Community College, University of Michigan-Dearborn and the Wayne County Airport Authority as authorized by Part 312 (Watershed Alliances) of the Michigan Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (MCL 324.101 to 324.90106) as amended by Act No. 517, Public Acts of 2004. (*Further information is available at www.allianceofrougecommunities.com*). Current Cooperating Partners include:

- Cranbrook Institute of Science
- Friends of the Rouge
- Rouge River Advisory Council
- Southeastern Oakland County Water Authority
- Wayne State University

The ARC Technical Committee, in addition to design and review of the annual ARC water quality monitoring program, develops materials to guide members in meeting state storm water permit requirements, assists in the development and implementation of technical training programs, and serves as liaison with the Michigan Department of Environment (MDEQ) on storm water permitting issues including the Rouge River Watershed Management Plan. The ARC Public Information and Education Committee (PIE) develops public information materials, sponsors workshops, and other public involvement activities to encourage stewardship of the river, coordinates activities with non-profit organizations and other public and private organizations interested in building public stewardship of the river, and conducts informational meetings for public officials to explain the role of the ARC and the benefits of governmental cooperation in addressing water management issues.

Funding for these activities as well as for the staff support of the ARC and its committees is raised through assessments to members based upon an allocation formula that gives equal weight to the population and land area for community contributions and a similar weighted assessment for non-community, public agency members. Local contributions are used to match grant dollars that currently represent nearly fifty percent of the annual ARC budget.

The ARC's structure requires a full membership meeting at least twice each year. Election of officers, adoption of the annual budget and assessments to communities, as well as any other formal action is reserved for the full membership meetings. The ARC takes formal actions based upon a majority vote of its members unless there is a call for a voting of member shares. The voting shares are directly proportional to the annual assessments. The Alliance elects three officers (i.e., Chair, Vice Chair, and Treasurer) from among its community members for two-year terms. The three officers, a former officer (immediate Past Chair, Vice Chair or Treasurer) one representative of each of the three counties and representatives from each of the seven subwatershed groups comprise the ARC Executive Committee that oversees the day to day operations between the meetings of the full Alliance. In addition, the chairs and vice-chairs of the Standing Committees (i.e., Finance, Public Involvement and Education, Technical.) are appointed by the three officers. Standing Committee membership is available to all members. The ARC may also establish other special committees (e.g., Nominating Committee for new officers) as necessary. The members and chair(s) of the Organization Committee, a special committee, are subject to approval by the full ARC. This committee examines and recommends organizational and other policies and procedures, including revisions to ARC Bylaws, and consideration of new public agency members and the designation of non-voting ARC Cooperating Partners. The ARC currently has contracted for an Executive Director and support services to assist in providing ARC services to members.

The ARC is the primary advocate for the Rouge River Watershed, serves as the primary spokesperson for ARC members, responds to requests for information and seeks opportunities to promote ARC awareness. The Executive Director serves as the ARC primary liaison to all members, including both formal and informal interaction with government officials, legislators and staff on a regular basis. The Executive Director also facilitates implementation of this strategic plan.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

This original ARC Strategic Plan was adopted by the ARC on May 6, 2008. The document was developed by the Organization Committee's Strategic Plan Subcommittee during 2007 and 2008. The 15 subcommittee members were asked to discuss where they would like the ARC to be in five years. In 2008, comments from the committee's first session were distilled into four focus areas:

- Membership
- Storm Water Permitting
- Financing
- Communications

The 2013 revised ARC Strategic Plan was developed by the Organization Committee, with assistance from several additional ARC members during 2010, 2012 and 2013.

MISSION AND VISION

Mission

The Alliance of Rouge Communities (ARC) will continue to improve the Rouge River, return its beneficial public uses, and provide active stewardship for future sustainability of the river. The ARC will reduce costs for meeting storm water permit requirements through cooperative efforts, and provide a state and national model for locally driven watershed approaches that minimize the need for State/Federal mandates.

Vision

We envision a dynamic working partnership comprised of Rouge River communities, counties and agencies working together to sustain a healthy and vibrant Rouge River.

MEMBERSHIP

The Alliance of Rouge Communities will continue to demonstrate value to its membership by providing technical assistance on permit issues, conducting public involvement and education activities and addressing other issues as they arise to benefit the organization. Ultimately, these activities demonstrate the value of a working partnership and will restore the designated uses of the Rouge River.

Retention of existing members and addition of new members to the ARC remains a challenge. From 2003-06, the ARC officers and membership focused on formalizing the ARC's organizational structure by pursuing watershed alliance enabling legislation, writing bylaws, and hiring an executive director. The ARC has done well retaining its membership during this transitional period. From 2007 to present, the ARC has focused on conducting activities that are meaningful to its membership.

The day-to-day operations of the ARC are overseen by the Executive Director through activities developed by the Standing Committees and the Organization Committee, approved by the Executive Committee and the full ARC. Currently, the Technical Committee oversees activities such as the monitoring program, permit activities and the illicit discharge elimination program. The Public Involvement and Education Committee oversees broad initiatives such as, conducting workshops, distributing materials and helping to publicize successes. The Organization Committee oversees membership requirements, policies and procedures and special initiatives. The Finance Committee oversees budget matters, including membership dues and finances. All ARC members receive the benefits of these activities, but these benefits must be sufficiently valuable to retain existing members and engage others. This goal's objectives will consistently underscore the benefit of ARC membership to a community that is a dynamic entity with changing demographics, officials and stakeholders.

GOAL 1: Retain members and recruit new ones

- a) The ARC will expand permit compliance support to include storm water permit compliance services and annual reporting.

Status: The ARC provides training, public education workshops, and printed materials. Additionally, it has developed an annual reporting tool for members and conducts an IDEP program with Wayne and Oakland County.

- b) The ARC will continue to expand membership through other permit holders such as school districts, universities and industry to participate in the ARC.
- c) The ARC will encourage the communities of Detroit, W. Bloomfield Township and Superior Township to become members of the ARC.

Status: The ARC is expanding its associate and cooperating partner membership and will focus on recruiting the individual communities mentioned above.

- d) Promote ARC membership by increasing its visibility and communicating the benefits to member communities, elected officials and agencies.
 - i. Prepare a presentation package for communities including a brochure and Powerpoint presentation.
 - ii. Conduct elected officials meetings/briefings.
 - iii. Develop a brochure that promotes the ARC.
 - iv. Send the Executive Director's Annual Report to city/township clerks and other elected officials.

Status: A presentation package was created in 2009. ARC promotional brochures were developed for ARC members and the public.

- e) Formalize the nomination process for officers.
 - i. Review the nomination process for ARC officers and either endorse or modify the policy to reflect the concerns of ARC members.

Status: The nominations policy was formalized in the amended ARC Bylaws (2012).

FINANCING

Since the Alliance of Rouge Communities (ARC) was created in 2003, member communities have paid dues based upon equal weight to the population of the unit of government within the watershed according to the most recent United States census and the land area within the watershed. The current assessment is not reduced based upon the addition of new members. There is some concern that dues may have to be increased to make up for the funding that could be lost without notice when federal funding ends. If dues are not increased when federal funding ends, the ARC would have to conduct its business with half of its current operating budget.

As mentioned previously, ARC dues pay for 50% of the following items necessary for storm water permit compliance:

- Executive Director and staff;
- Water Quality Monitoring Program;
- Public Education activities;
- Illicit Discharge Elimination Program (IDEP) activities;
- Watershed Planning;
- Advocacy with agencies like the Michigan Department of Environment (MDEQ) , the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), the Michigan congressional delegation, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and
- Subwatershed Management Advisory Group facilitation.

The ARC continues to develop strategies for long-term funding. One of the underlying reasons for creating the ARC was to reduce the cost of storm water permit compliance by working together to address water quality policy in general, storm water permit issues and Public Education Plan (PEP) and Illicit Discharge Elimination Program (IDEP) compliance. Currently, 50% of ARC activities are funded by Wayne County using the Rouge River National Wet Weather Demonstration Project (Rouge Project) funds. The other 50% of ARC costs are paid for by the member communities. Select additional storm water activities in the Rouge River watershed are also subsidized by the Rouge Project grant. Additionally, since 2010 the ARC has been successful in writing for and receiving federal and state grants to address green infrastructure, habitat and monitoring issues. Total Wayne County Rouge Project funding for Rouge River watershed activities has been reduced over the years and will stop all together in 2014. At the same time, costs to local governments for storm water compliance are increasing and revenues are decreasing. It could be harder to pay to support permit activities.

GOAL 2: Develop and attract resources that enable the ARC to accomplish its goals

- a) The ARC will investigate other financing options, including a storm water utility and a comprehensive chapter 20 drainage district, to fund the activities of the ARC.
- b) The Finance Committee will review the membership dues structure and endorse or modify it to reflect the concerns of the member communities.
 - i. The Finance Committee will recalculate membership dues based on the 2010 U.S. Census consistent with the Bylaws.
- c) The Finance Committee will investigate the creation of a contingency fund/reserve to augment the transition to funding the ARC using dues (when the Rouge Project grant ends)
 - i. The contingency fund will be based on the results of the annual audit.

Status: The ARC carries forward an unallocated funds budget line, but it has not created a formalized contingency fund.

- d) The Executive Director will investigate and pursue alternative funding sources, especially grants and donations to support ongoing operations of the ARC.

Status: Local, state and federal grant applications are ongoing.

- e) The ARC will develop a plan for approaching private sector companies within the watershed for project sponsorship and partnership opportunities.

GOAL 3: Be more cost-efficient/share costs

- a) Continue to pool resources for water quality monitoring, public education and involvement, and other storm water permit requirements.
 - i. The cost effectiveness of this effort must be documented as described under Goal 1 to clearly demonstrate the efficiencies gained through participation on the ARC.

Status: This is ongoing and is documented in the Executive Director's Annual Report.

- b) Leverage county resources.
 - i. The County services remain a cost effective means for permit compliance and should be coordinated and documented through the ARC.

Status: Ongoing

- c) Formalize policies and processes related to management of the ARC as needed.

Status: Since 2008, the ARC has created and updated nearly 20 policies and procedures as necessary to assist with effective and efficient management of the ARC.

STORM WATER PERMITTING

The cost of permit compliance continues to grow but the ARC continues to look for ways to control cost while improving water quality. In 2012, the MDEQ approved a revised Rouge River Watershed Management Plan (WMP) that incorporated all seven subwatershed plans and set goals and objectives watershed-wide. The ARC continues to work toward one permit for the watershed that would be administered by the ARC. Additionally, the ARC has created an annual report template that could facilitate reporting under one permit. A single permit could:

- Allow all ARC communities to address the same set of goals and objectives;
- Allow the ARC to focus on watershed-wide solutions to solve water quality problems,
- Pave the way for a single annual report which would outline comprehensively all ARC activities that address permit activities in a year and reduce the resources spent by communities to complete their annual reports, and
- Provide for consistent reporting on watershed activities.

Status: The ARC is in the process of fulfilling this through the revised WMP and the annual report template has been developed with oversight by the Technical Committee.

GOAL 4: Continue to work toward establishing a single watershed permit for the Rouge River

- a) Use the standard reporting methods/one annual report developed in 2010 to secure approval from MDEQ for a consolidated annual reporting mechanism concurrently with the single permit approach.
- b) Request assistance from the USEPA with developing a single watershed permit.

Status: This is the direction the ARC is heading in with the current approved Rouge River WMP and the annual report template. This could be accomplished through negotiating one watershed permit for the Rouge Communities.

GOAL 5: Address Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) as required

- a) The ARC is evaluating the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) requirements so to better advise ARC members on compliance. The TMDL policy of the USEPA has been challenged in court continuously for decades. The result is a haphazard program that varies from state to state and region to region.
- b) The ARC continues to perform water quality monitoring to assist in evaluating its TMDLs.

Status: The Rouge River has been issued three TMDLs and the ARC continues to address these as required.

GOAL 6: Assist members with permit compliance

- a) Annual Reporting and Audits
- b) Policies and Procedures
- c) Collaborative PEP and IDEP

COMMUNICATIONS

Environmental programs continue to evolve and the cost of compliance changes from year to year. The ARC should consider how best to impact these changes in a manner that continues water quality improvement but limits the cost of less productive bureaucratic procedures. A comprehensive communications strategy should be developed to communicate with the following parties:

- MDEQ
- ARC Members, Associate Members and Cooperating Members
- Other watershed alliances/groups
- Potential members and partners
- The Media

Status: Ongoing

GOAL 7: Develop and implement a communications strategy

- a) Develop a communications strategy
- b) Regularly create press releases on newsworthy ARC events and initiatives
- c) Write an annual report targeted to local boards and commissions.
- d) Generate a quarterly e-mail that discusses issues being addressed and other information that is important to ARC members.
- e) Make ARC staff available for presentations to local boards, councils and commissions.
- f) Conduct meetings with the MDEQ and the USEPA as required
- g) Maintain and update ARC website (www.allianceofrougecommunities.com)

Status: All are ongoing.